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Virtual translator a real boost to Orlando firm

Orlando Business Journal - August 17, 2007 by [Chris Kauffmann](#) Staff Writer

ORLANDO -- The Orlando-based U.S. Army Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training & Instrumentation searched worldwide for a product to help American soldiers communicate better in Iraq when translators weren't available.

It found what it needed in its own backyard.

Orlando's Vcom3D Inc. came away earlier this month with an initial sale of \$676,000 and a second order pending for its Vcommunicator Mobile LC. The first order of 320 units will be delivered by the end of August.

The product could bode well for the future of Vcom3D, which was founded by Carol Wideman and Edward Sims in 1997 to produce interactive products for the deaf and hard of hearing.

After living for the past 10 years on \$12 million in grants from the departments of education and defense and the National Science Foundation, Vcom3D no longer will have to rely only on grants as of this year, says Wideman.

The private company doesn't disclose its revenue, but the staff doubled to 24 people this year and plans to hire more.

Meeting requirements

The Vcommunicator Mobile is an iPod-based tool that allows soldiers to communicate in Iraqi Arabic and Kurdish on mission-specific issues. The soldiers either can use it as a training tool to learn the languages themselves or to project or show the recorded voice phrases to a local population.

It also includes virtual characters speaking the phrases and video animations of culturally appropriate gestures.

"We did a market survey in April and the Vcom product was the only one that met our requirements," says Cory Youmans, director of acquisition support for the army program, which is located on Research Parkway. "Today's young soldier will have no problem learning how to operate it very quickly."

The Vcommunicator's capability should become important to the military, which is suffering from a severe shortage of translators in Iraq, he says.

Commercial applications next?

Although Vcom3D has been working on military applications for its products for the past five years, it wasn't until last October it started on the Vcommunicator Mobile for the military.

That's when military consultants to the company saw its work on iPods and personal digital assistants for the deaf and hard of hearing and expressed a desire for something that would act as a trainer, but also have practical military applications.

Vcom3D already has started working on Pashtu and Dari language versions of the Vcommunicator for use in the Afghanistan conflict. As well, it's looking at other locations around the globe for both military and humanitarian applications.

Moreover, Wideman and Sims believe there could be commercial and corporate applications to the device. The travel industry is one potential market, they say. They also are looking at producing the tool in other languages for those who don't speak English.

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Jim Garchidi
Ernie Bright, operations
manager at Vcom3D,
displays video animation of
a soldier gesturing and
speaking.
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